



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

**Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.**

**Monday, March 29, 2004**

**7:00 PM**

**GROTON SENIOR CENTER, ROUTE 117**

#### **FYE 2005 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

#### **I. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Sheets, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright  
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Director of Emergency Services Joe Sastre, Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo, Director of Administrative Services Doug Ackerman, Director of Public Works Gary Schneider, Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Mitchell, Board of Education Chairman Elizabeth Gianacoplos, Board of Education Members Chaz Zezulka, Rita Volkman, Marcia Greenhalgh, and Robert Peruzzotti, Several RTM members, Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox and Office Assistant Maegan Plunkett.*

#### **II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

*was led by RTM Moderator Shirley Dunbar-Rose.*

#### **III. INTRODUCTION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS**

*was announced by Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox and Mayor Harry Watson.*

#### **IV. READING OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

*was read by Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox.*

#### **V. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS**

##### **a. Superintendent of Schools**

*Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Mitchell gave a power point presentation on the proposed Board of Education budget for fiscal year 2005.*

##### **b. Town Manager**

*Town Manager Mark Oefinger gave a summary of the proposed Town budget for fiscal year 2005.*

#### **VI. OPENING OF THE PUBLIC HEARING**

*Mayor Watson called the FYE 2005 Budget Public Hearing to order at 7:50 p.m.*

*John Sutherland, 32 Neptune Drive, read a letter submitted to the Town Council regarding his opinion of the Fiscal Year 2005 proposed Town budget. He feels if the budget is to be cut, then services will be reduced. He addressed the Town Council with several questions regarding their viewpoints going into the budget review process.*

*John Sparkman, 52 Soundbreeze Avenue, said he disagreed with the recent article in The Day newspaper. The article stated five councilors had broken the law by meeting on their own accord. He noted that it would only be an illegal act if a quorum of six councilors had been present. Mr. Sparkman feels The Day owes the Council an apology.*

*Hank Steinfeld, 32 Valley Road, supports the proposed Fiscal Year 2005 budget. He said the*

*Town Manager did an excellent job and the budget should be passed, "as is." Mr. Steinford is a member of the Planning Commission, and is concerned about the capital improvement projects that he says have been put off year after year.*

*Jack Sebastian, 4 East Shore Avenue, does not want Town services reduced. He would like to see some middle management positions within the Town eliminated to save money. He noted his concern of Town Manager Oefinger operating different departments within the Town that he feels Mr. Oefinger has little knowledge of. Mr. Sebastian suggested hiring a consultant to organize the departments in Town. He would like to see the Board of Education proposed budget reduced by at least \$3 million.*

*Cassandra Simoncini, 92 New London Road, said she supports a zero increase in the FY2005 Budget. She feels the Board of Education and the Town have been getting "top of the line Budgets" for too long. She noted the Town budget should not depend solely on property tax money. She would rather see a reduction in Town services and employees than to have taxes increased.*

*Julie Maisch, 42 Circle Avenue, requested the Town continue to support the Eastern Connecticut Symphony. She spoke of the beauty of music during these trying times.*

*Rose Marie Althius, 4 Appletree Lane, asked the Town to continue to support the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra by keeping \$3,000.00 in the proposed budget. She spoke of the outreach program the Symphony has that goes into the schools to help children learn and understand music.*

*Marion Orkney, 30 Circle Avenue, supports the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra. She noted the Town is very fortunate to have the orchestra here, otherwise she would have to travel to New York or Boston to see music of this quality.*

*Jane Dauphinais, 826 Groton Long Point Road, said she views the expenditures of the Town as an investment in preserving the community and quality of life. She asked the Council not to reduce the budget or compromise the services provided by the Town to the taxpayers.*

*Diane Marley, 172 Crosswinds Drive, said her taxes went up due to the revaluation forty-eight percent in fiscal year 2003 and another ten percent in fiscal year 2004. She urged the Town Council to cut taxes and listen to the taxpayers that have spoken. She feels the pay increase to the Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Mitchell is unacceptable during these times. Speaking as President of the Groton Good Government PAC, she would like to see a five percent decrease in the budget.*

*Millage Small, 191 Prospect Hill Road, addressed several individual line items in the budget and questioned what the expenses are for. He asked why the Board of Education has twelve trucks and six vans for their use. He feels this is unnecessary. He feels the Board of Education and the Town can reduce the budget without cutting school programs and Town services.*

*Gordon Lange, 1 Soundbreeze, suggested residents get involved in the budget process by reading the budget book and attending Finance Committee Meetings to know what is "really" going on. He stated his frustration with residents who have spoken tonight and have no idea what is in the Budget book.*

*Kevin Trejo, 536 Shennecossett Road, feels there will be major problems and unexpected expenses if too many budget items are reduced. Mr. Trejo agrees with Town Manager Mark Oefinger regarding the budget in reducing areas that can be reduced. Mr. Trejo noted living expenses increase every year, not just property taxes.*

*Nora Patterson, 41 Ledge Land Drive, RTM member and Special Education Tutor at Fitch High School, spoke of the reduction in services, and employees the schools have already sacrificed. She feels the Town cannot afford to take away anymore services from the schools.*

*Sydney Van Zandt, 3 Front Street, former President and one of the founders of the Groton Open Space Acquisition Fund, spoke of the need for the Town to have funds for open space preservation. She said the Planning Commission also recommends setting aside money in the Open Space Acquisition Fund.*

*Jack Rogers, 5 Clubhouse Point, said the 3.2% increase in the proposed Town budget is not acceptable. He spoke of his disgust with the Board of Education budget increase. Mr. Rogers recommends Town employees start paying a higher portion of their health insurance premiums.*

*Edith Fairgrieve, 8 Rowland Street, spoke in favor of setting aside money in the budget to establish an Open Space Land Acquisition Fund.*

*Jim Young, 27 Clipper Court, compared Groton's taxes to the taxes in other Connecticut towns. Mr. Young said the Town's current mill rate is lower than most of the surrounding Towns. He spoke of increases in living expenses, stating the cost of everything goes up, not just taxes.*

*Robert Schneider, 3 Main Street, spoke of the excellence in services the Town provides. He feels the \$25,000 is very important in the budget to initiate an Open Space Acquisition Fund for the Town.*

*Beth Tillman, 925 River Road, spoke in support of the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra. She spoke of an increase in expenses for the Orchestra. However, the Town's contribution has actually decreased in recent years. She would like the Town to continue its support of the Symphony.*

*Priscilla Pratt, 75 North Street, spoke in support of an Open Space Acquisition Fund. She noted many residents feel property taxes will rise with established open space, yet that is not the case.*

*Joe Baril, 26 St. Joseph Court, President of Poquonnock Bridge Fire Department, spoke against the Town reducing any more services to residents. He said bulky waste pick-up was eliminated last year, noting he sees much more large waste strewn around town. He urged the Council not to cut the Community Policing program in Fort Hill Homes. Mr. Baril said he would rather see his taxes increase than lose services that have taken the Town time to establish.*

*Mike Doyle, 15 Elm Street, spoke in support of the proposed FY 2005 Town Budget and Board of Education Budget. Mr. Doyle said he is willing to pay more in taxes to avoid any further reductions to the two budgets.*

*Debra Dickey, 302 Thames Street, spoke in agreement with the article in The Day regarding five Councilors meeting in private. Ms. Dickey said five councilors is not a quorum, but it is a majority and is not in the spirit of the law. She feels the five councilors meeting without public knowledge is not appropriate behavior for public officials. She spoke against making any further reductions to the proposed budget. She feels with a zero percent increase every year to the Town budget, Groton will end up a second class Town with poor schools.*

*Robert Hall, 164 Gales Ferry Road, spoke in favor of maintaining only basic services for Town residents, such as Police and Fire protection. Mr. Hall opposes other town services such as boating classes, rock concerts, sporting events, children's activities and weekend library hours. Mr. Hall said those residents who would like more services should pay for them privately. He*

*spoke of the high cost of his taxes and noted he paid much less for taxes in Michigan when he lived there.*

*Oliver Porter, 44 Main Street, said his basic plea is for responsible management. Mr. Porter feels the management is paid well and should prove they are worthy of their salaries. He opposes the Board of Education proposed budget noting we are in difficult economic times.*

*David Barber, 1019 Groton Long Point Road, spoke in opposition of the proposed budget. He feels the budget should be reduced by another five percent.*

*Mayor Watson closed the FYE 2005 Budget Public Hearing at 9:05 p.m.*

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion to adjourn was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti and so voted unanimously. Adjournment was taken at 9:05 p.m.*

*Attest:*

*Barbara Tarbox  
Town Clerk*

*Maegan Plunkett  
Office Assistant*